



Community Health Improvement Process

**2014-2015 Community Health Needs Assessment
Community Conversation with the Germantown Pedestrian Group
Up County Regional Services Center, Germantown, MD
September 19, 2015**

Introduction

Healthy Montgomery hosted a community conversation on health and well-being at the Up County Regional Services Center on Saturday, September 19, 2015. The conversation was hosted in collaboration with the Germantown Pedestrian Group and took place from 10:00 am to 12:00 pm in Germantown, MD. There were 8 participants. The conversation was facilitated by Nancy Martin.

The community conversation included a discussion of what is meant by health and well-being at the individual and community levels, elements of a healthy community, community assets and challenges in Montgomery County, and practical steps to improve the health and well-being of the community. Participants engaged in one small group discussion, and were also offered the opportunity to contribute comments and feedback regarding the meeting in writing.

Defining Health and Well-Being

The group began its discussion by defining “healthy” for an individual. The group description included meeting basic needs of food, shelter and safety, in addition to physical activity, healthy food choices, mental health, preventive healthcare, and having motivation and goals. The group then worked to describe a health community, emphasizing a safe and secure environment, with access to green space, outdoor areas that facilitate walking and biking, diverse options for food shopping, parks and recreation facilities, cultural activities, family friendly spaces and activities, accessible public transportation and facilities, responsive government, and adequate zoning regulations.

Assets that Support Health and Well-Being

Participants discussed assets of their community that allow for health and well-being, emphasizing the strengths detailed below:

- Germantown's Black Hill Regional Park offers an exceptional green space, with boating and hiking trails.
- Germantown does not have the clutter of billboards.
- Public safety services (policy and fire) are fairly strong in Germantown.
- There are jobs available in the Germantown/Gaithersburg area, so residents do not necessarily need to go elsewhere for work.
- Montgomery County has well-maintained roads and sidewalks.
- Germantown is racially and ethnically diverse (although there are still issues with discrimination).
- Germantown boasts excellent shopping facilities (especially for food).



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- Montgomery County and the surrounding region offer many options for higher education, and on average, residents of the County have high levels of education.
- The median age of the Germantown area is younger.
- The Germantown area provides residents with good access to healthcare.
- Germantown is close to Washington, DC.
- Germantown has agricultural areas, with local produce sold from farms and stores.
- Germantown offers residents many cultural activities.
- Montgomery County's public schools are strong.
- Montgomery County has responsive government (but citizens do not always know how to connect).

Barriers to Health and Well-Being

Participants discussed obstacles to optimal health and well-being in Germantown/Montgomery County, emphasizing the challenges detailed below.

- The cost of living is very high in the area and affordable housing is in short supply, especially for senior citizens.
- The area has become crowded, and this has a negative impact on local resources and traffic.
- Pedestrian safety needs to be improved in Germantown.
- Traffic patterns need to be addressed to reduce pollution and congestion and increase public safety.
- Germantown residents do not always display pride in their community (e.g., shopping carts left strewn about in neighborhoods).
- The public school system is struggling to adapt to increased diversity of the student population.
- Without a mayor, Germantown residents do not have adequate representation in Montgomery County.
- Teenage alcohol abuse, including driving under the influence of alcohol, need to be more effectively addressed.
- Many motorists text while driving.
- There are many homeless people panhandling on the streets.
- It is difficult to find affordable childcare in the area.

Practical Steps to Improve Health and Well-Being

Participants worked to identify specific actions they recommend the County take to improve the health and well-being of the community, including the priorities and other practical suggestions discussed below.



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PRIORITIES (mentioned or “voted for” by numerous participants)

1. Montgomery County should work to improve pedestrian safety around Seneca Valley High School (SVHS), where safer crosswalks are needed. In addition, SVHS students should be discouraged from crossing the highway on foot.
2. Montgomery County should make use of more speed and red light cameras in traffic "hot spots". Residents should be involved in decision-making about placement and process.
3. Montgomery County should pay greater attention to how government interacts with the Germantown Community.
4. Montgomery County should increase the presence of police in the Germantown area.
5. Montgomery County should increase efforts to reduce teens' risky behaviors.
 - Pay greater attention to prevention efforts, including a focus on parental accountability.
 - Improve enforcement of underage drinking, drinking or texting while driving.

OTHER PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS (Not “voted” as top priorities)

1. Montgomery County should work to increase the amount of affordable housing, particularly for the elderly (and this should include good resources for aging in place).
2. Montgomery County should pay greater attention to the unique needs of a diverse K-12 student population, with more integrated supports and expansion of summer programming.
3. Montgomery County should place more emphasis on community engagement and inclusion.

Finally, the group requested that the final report on the Healthy Montgomery Community Conversations be disseminated to the County Council.

Community Conversation Feedback

Participants were provided an opportunity to give written feedback about the meeting. In a short closeout survey, participants were asked, “Is there anything else that you want us to know, including what you like or did not like about this community conversation?”

No closeout surveys were received.